The Ruth H. Hooker Research Library

and Technical Information Center

Networking CD-ROMS to End Users in a Campus Environment

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1992, the Ruth H. Hooker Research Library and Technical Information Center of the Naval Research Laboratory implemented the InfoNet, an "information utility" that serves as a single source for many of a researcher's or administrator's information needs and is, furthermore, available from every user's desktop. The InfoNet provides the user with access to a spectrum of information resources, including CD-ROM databases, over a campus-wide network, thereby eliminating multiple trips to the Library to gather reference and citation information. The InfoNet provides researchers with information where and when they need it the most: at their desktops, 24 hours a day, and on their computing platform of choice. This article describes cost and licensing issues that need to be addressed in implementing campus-wide or organizational access to CD-ROM products.

2. CD-ROM LICENSING IN A CAMPUS NETWORK ENVIRONMENT

The purchase of a CD-ROM database is not a transfer of ownership but a license to use the product within the constraints of the licensing agreement. Unlike a sale in which the seller loses all rights except those covered under copyright, license agreements contain specific terms and conditions which control the usage of the product. The CD-ROM vendor controls all rights granted under the license; rights not mentioned in the license must be negotiated. Should the purchaser not be satisfied with the conditions of the license, and the vendor be unwilling to change the conditions, the purchaser has only one choice left: not to buy the product.

The most common types of licensing are for individual workstations or for individual users. However, another type of licensing arrangement exists, one that is much more suitable for a campus network environment. It is called concurrent licensing and provides a license for an unrestricted but limited number of simultaneous users who belong to a specific group, such as a specific site of an agency.

This form of licensing requires the use of additional software to handle the allocation of CD-ROM access privileges. Metering software functions as a form of overseer, ensuring that simultaneous usage of a product never exceeds the limit imposed by the license.

Individual publishers vary greatly in how they license their products. Generally speaking, however, licenses usually restrict the copying of data from the CD-ROM onto other media and usually require that the product be returned or destroyed after either a new disk is sent to the customer, or the subscription is canceled. Moreover, network licensing agreements often control the number of users, workstations, buildings, and/or sites connected to the network and restrict the use of modems for remote network access. To network CD-ROMs in a campus or organizational environment, licensing terms must usually be individually negotiated with each publisher.

3. ECONOMICS OF NETWORKING CD-ROMS

Providing networked access to a single CD-ROM product from multiple workstations, either within the

library or over a campus network, has obvious advantageous. One surprising advantage is that response time for searching a networked product can be almost twice as fast as for a stand-alone product. Other advantages are the elimination of queuing as multiple users are provided with simultaneous access to a single CD-ROM product and the elimination of workstations dedicated to specific products.

It is difficult to generalize about the cost of specific products. The cost of stand-alone CD-ROM licenses vary widely; an annual fee may be as little as $30 for the U.S. Code of Federal Regulations from the Government Printing Office to a list price of $15,000 for the Science Citation Index with Abstracts from the Institute of Scientific Information. The cost for a concurrent license varies, but it is seldom more than twice the price of a stand-alone version for up to five simultaneous users. However, an occasional vendor will impose fees that are almost five times the cost of a stand-alone version.

In addition to the cost of the information products provided on a CD-ROM network, a library needs to be prepared for other ongoing costs. These include hardware and software maintenance costs, the costs for system upgrades, enhancements or replacements, and the cost of staff to administer the system.

4. JUSTIFYING EXPENDITURES FOR NETWORKING CD-ROMS

One way to look at CD-ROM use is to assume that were the user not able to search the CD- ROM database remotely, he or she would have needed to visit the library to perform manual research or request a mediated search. When CD-ROMs can be searched remotely, the user is saved the time of a such a visit to the library and the library is saved the cost of performing a search on Dialog or some other commercial system.

Because the NRL research staff are located throughout the 130-acre campus, a visit to the NRL Library is likely to take a minimum of an hour. The average hourly salary for a researcher plus the average cost to the Library for an online search can be multiplied by the number of CD-ROM searches performed remotely to compute monthly or annual savings.

The estimated savings makes no attempt to put a dollar value on the true benefits to the researcher of having information whenever the need arises. However, over and above the savings computed on the basis of direct costs and time saved, such immediate access to information can be expected to support work flow and improve productivity. Furthermore, it has the potential for eliminating the problems associated with doing without information, a danger whenever information is difficult to obtain. The results of doing without information include: duplicative research, "reinventing the wheel," use of out-dated or erroneous data and failure to follow up on ideas and associations with the potential for pay-off.

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